Society of La Salle Brothers v Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri

COURT OF APPEAL (PUTRAJAYA) — CIVIL APPEAL NO B-01(A)-83–03 OF 2016
TENGKU MAIMUN, ABDUL RAHMAN SEBLI AND ZALEHA YUSOF JJCA
18 APRIL 2017

Statutory Interpretation — Repeal — Does not affect earlier acts or rights — Appellant enjoyed tax exemption status under s 13(1)(g) of the Income Tax Ordinance 1947 ('the Ordinance') — The Ordinance was wholly repealed and replaced by the Income Tax Act 1967 ('the ITA') — Provisions on tax exemption in the ITA underwent series of amendments under successive Finance Acts — Whether neither the ITA nor any of amending acts contained any express provision or acted retrospectively to remove appellant's vested right to tax exemption under the Ordinance — Effect of s 30(1)(b) of the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 — Whether appellant unaffected by amendment to para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA which ended tax-exemption status enjoyed by certain parties unless approval for continuation of such status applied for and obtained — Whether Inland Revenue Department wrong to have issued appellant notices of assessment for failing to 're-apply' for tax exemption status — Whether appellant not precluded from applying to quash Inland Revenue Department's decision by way of judicial review instead of appealing to Special Commissioners for Income Tax under s 99 of the ITA

The appellant, which had enjoyed tax exemption status as a charitable institution during its more than 160-year existence in Malaysia, was informed by the respondent by a letter dated 25 July 1995 that it had to re-apply for tax-exemption status. The appellant failed to do so. On 27 March 2015, the appellant was served with notices of assessment dated 16 March 2015, with penalties, for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 ('the notices of assessment'). The total assessment raised, including the penalties, was more than RM40m. The appellant was granted leave by the High Court to file a judicial review application to quash the respondent's decision to issue the notices of assessment on the ground the decision was ultra vires, illegal, void, unlawful and/or in excess of authority. At the hearing of the application proper before the High Court, the appellant argued that it was a charitable organisation that had enjoyed tax-exemption status pursuant to s 13(1)(g) of the Income Tax Ordinance 1947 ('the 1947 Ordinance') and that when the 1947 Ordinance was wholly repealed and replaced by the Income Tax Act 1967 ('the ITA 1967') and further amendments to the tax-exemption provisions in the ITA 1967 were brought about by the Finance Acts of 1986,

1988, 2000 and 2007, none of those changes to the law had retrospective effect so as to impair or remove the appellant's vested right to tax-exemption granted under the 1947 Ordinance. The respondent, on the other hand, contended that: (a) the judicial review application was an abuse of process of court as the appellant should have exercised the right of appeal to the Special Commissioners of Income Tax under s 99 of the ITA 1967; (b) the appellant ceased to enjoy tax-exemption status when it failed to apply for that status under the amendments to the law; (c) although the notices of assessment for the years of assessment 2004, 2006 and 2007 fell outside the limitation period, there was fraud and/or negligence on the appellant's part with regard to the tax exemption; (d) the burden was on the appellant to prove that the assessment was excessive or erroneous; and (e) the penalties were rightly imposed on the appellant. The High Court dismissed the judicial review application holding that: (i) following the amendments to the law, in particular, s 27 of the Finance (No 2) Act 2000 read together with s 44(6) of the ITA 1967, the appellant's tax-exemption status ceased to have effect from the year of assessment 2003 for the basis period ending in that year and the appellant had not applied for and obtained approval for continuation of that status from the Director-General of Inland Revenue; (ii) the notices of assessment were in accordance with the ITA 1967; (iii) the argument that the amendments to the law did not have retrospective effect did not apply on the facts of the case as the appellant was told to reapply for tax exemption; (iv) the application for judicial review was inappropriate and an abuse of process of court as the appellant failed to resort to the appeal procedure provided for under s 99 of the ITA 1967; (v) the notices of assessment for the years 2004, 2006, and 2007 were rightly issued although they were beyond the period provided by s 90(1) of the ITA 1967, because the appellant failed to discharge the burden of proving that there was no wilful default, fraud or negligence on its part; and (vi) the penalties imposed on the appellant were in accordance with s 112(3) of the ITA 1967. The instant appeal was against the High Court's decision.

Held, allowing the appeal:

(1) The respondent's decision to issue the notices of assessment was illegal and without jurisdiction as it failed to take into account the appellant's vested right under the 1947 Ordinance which was not impaired by the amendments effected to the ITA 1967. The appellant's failure to re-apply for tax exemption was of no significance. The decision of the respondent was thus amenable to judicial review (see paras 47 & 52).

(2) The court accepted the appellant's position that it was granted tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance. While the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced in whole by the ITA 1967, there were no express provisions in the ITA 1967 which indicated that the vested rights acquired under the 1947 Ordinance were revoked. In rejecting the appellant's argument that the amendments to the ITA 1967 did not affect

the appellant's rights, the High Court failed to direct its mind to s 30(1)(b) of the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 which provided that the repeal of a written law in whole or in part shall not affect any right, privilege, obligation or liability acquired, accrued or incurred under the repealed law. This failure on the part of the High Court was an error of law. Nothing in the ITA 1967 expressly took away the appellant's vested right under the 1947 Ordinance; neither was there anything in the amending provisions which were inconsistent with the application of s 30 of the Interpretation Acts (see paras 35–37 & 43–44).

(3) While the tax exemption granted under the ITA 1967 would have ceased automatically pursuant to the amendments to the ITA 1967, those amendments did not affect the appellant as it was not granted the exemption under the ITA 1967 but rather under the 1947 Ordinance, which exemption remained valid and had not been revoked. Pursuant to s 30(1)(b) of the Interpretation Acts, the appellant continued to be entitled to the tax exemption. The amendments to para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 were all expressly stated to have prospective effect. Further, while s 27 of the Finance (No 2) Act 2000 specifically excluded taxpayers who were previously exempted under para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967, it did not exclude those who were exempted under s 13(1)(g) of the 1947 Ordinance (see paras 45–46).

(4) Notwithstanding that the appellant failed to resort to the appeal procedure under s 99 of the ITA 1967, it could not be precluded from applying for judicial review (see para 48).

(5) The High Court erred in its ruling on the burden of proof. The burden was on the respondent to prove fraud (see paras 50–51).

[Bahasa Malaysia summary

Perayu, yang telah menikmati status pengecualian cukai sebagai institusi amal sepanjang kewujudannya yang lebih 160 tahun di Malaysia, telah diberitahu oleh responden melalui surat bertarikh 25 Julai 1995 bahawa ia perlu mendaftar semula untuk status pengecualian cukai. Perayu telah gagal berbuat sedemikian. Pada 27 Mac 2015, perayu telah disampaikan notis taksiran bertarikh 16 Mac 2015, dengan penalti, untuk taksiran tahun-tahun 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 dan 2013 ('notis-notis taksiran tersebut'). Jumlah taksiran, termasuk penalti, adalah melebihi RM40 juta. Perayu telah diberikan kebenaran oleh Mahkamah Tinggi untuk memfailkan permohonan semakan kehakiman bagi membatalkan keputusan responden untuk mengeluarkan notis-notis taksiran tersebut atas alasan keputusan itu adalah ultra vires, menyalahi undang-undang, tidak sah, salah dan/atau melebihi autoriti. Semasa perbicaraan permohonan sebenar di hadapan Mahkamah Tinggi, perayu berhujah bahawa ia adalah organisasi amal yang telah menikmati status pengecualian cukai menurut s 13(1)(g) Ordinan Cukai

Pendapatan 1947 ('Ordinan 1947') dan bahawa apabila Ordinan 1947 telah dimansuhkan keseluruhannya dan digantikan oleh Akta Cukai Pendapatan 1967 ('ACP 1967') dan pindaan selanjutnya kepada peruntukan pengecualian cukai dalam ACP 1967 yang dibuat oleh Akta-Akta Kewangan 1986, 1988, 2000 dan 2007, tiada perubahan kepada daripada undang-undang tersebut mempunyai kesan kebelakang sehingga menjejaskan atau menghapuskan hak yang diberi kepada perayu untuk pengecualian cukai di bawah Ordinan 1947 tersebut. Responden, sebaliknya, berhujah bahawa: (a) permohonan semakan kehakiman itu satu penyalahgunaan proses mahkamah kerana perayu patut menggunakan hak rayuan kepada Pesuruhajaya Khas Cukai Pendapatan di bawah s 99 ACP 1967; (b) perayu telah berhenti menikmati status pengeculian cukai apabila ia gagal memohon untuk status tersebut di bawah pindaan-pindaan kepada undang-undang; (c) walaupun notis-notis taksiran untuk tahun-tahun taksiran 2004, 006 dan 2007 tidak terjatuh dalam tempoh had masa, terdapat fraud dan/atau kecuaian di pihak perayu berhubung pengecualian cukai; (d) beban terletak pada perayu untuk membuktikan bahawa taksiran itu berlebihan atau salah; dan (e) penalti-penalti telah wajar dikenakan ke atas perayu. Mahkamah Tinggi telah menolak semakan kehakiman dengan memutuskan bahawa: (i) berikutan pindaan-pindaan kepada undang-undang, khususnya, s 27 Akta Kewangan (No 2) 2000 dibaca bersama dengan s 44(6) ACP 1967, status pengecualian cukai perayu berhenti untuk memberi kesan dari tahun taksiran 2003 untuk tempoh asas berakhir tahun tersebut dan perayu tidak memohon untuk dan memperoleh kelulusan untuk sambungan status tersebut daripada Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri; (ii) notis-notis taksiran adalah menurut ACP 1967; (iii) hujah bahawa pindaan-pindaan kepada undang-undang tidak mempunyai kesan kebelakang tidak terpakai kepada fakta kes kerana perayu diberitahu untuk memohon semula pengecualian cukai; (iv) permohonan untuk semakan kehakiman adalah tidak sesuai dan satu penyalahgunaan proses mahkamah kerana perayu gagal untuk mengambil prosedur rayuan yang diperuntukkan di bawah s 99 ACP 1967; (v) notis-notis taksiran untuk tahun-tahun 2004, 2006 dan 2007 telah dikeluarkan sewajarnya meskipun ia telah melebihi tempoh yang diperuntukkan oleh s 9(1) ACP 1967, kerana perayu telah gagal melepaskan beban membuktikan bahawa tiada kegagalan yang disengajakan, fraud atau kecuaian di pihaknya; dan (vi) penalti-penalti yang dikenakan ke atas perayu adalah menurut s 112(3) ACP 1967. Rayuan ini adalah terhadap keputusan Mahkamah Tinggi.

Diputuskan, membenarkan rayuan:

(1) Keputusan responden untuk mengeluarkan notis-noti taksiran adalah menyalahi undang-undang dan tanpa bidang kuasa kerana ia telah gagal mengambil kira hak yang diberikan kepada perayu di bawah Ordinan 1947 yang tidak terjejas oleh pindaan-pindaan yang dibuat kepada ACP 1967. Kegagalan perayu untuk memohon semula pengecualian cukai

adalah tidak penting. Keputusan responden dengan itu telah bersetuju dengan semakan kehakiman (lihat perenggan 47 & 52).

(2) Mahkamah menerima kedudukan perayu bahawa ia telah diberikan pengeculian cukai di bawah Ordinan 1947. Di mana Ordinan 1947 telah dimansuhkan dan digantikan secara menyeluruh oleh ACP 1967, tiada peruntukan nyata dalam ACP 1967 yang menunjukkan bahawa hak terletak hak yang diperoleh di bawah Ordinan 1947 adalah dibatalkan. Dalam menolak hujah perayu bahawa pindaan-pindaan kepada ACP 1967 tidak menjejaskan hak perayu, Mahkamah Tinggi telah gagal mengarahkan mindanya kepada s 30(1)(b) Akta Tafsiran 1948 dan 1967 yang memperuntukkan bahawa pemansuhan undang-undang bertulis secara keseluruhan atau sebahagian tidak menjejaskan apa-apa hak, perlindungan, obligasi atau liabilit yang diperoleh, terakru atau ditanggung di bawah undang-undang yang dimasuhkan itu. Kegagalan ini di pihak Mahkamah Tinggi adalah kesilapan undang-undang. Tiada apa-apa dalam ACP 1967 dengan jelas menghapuskan hak terletak hak perayu di bawah Ordinan 1947; mahupun tiada apa-apa dalam peruntukan pindaan yag tidak konsisten dengan permohonan s 30 Akta Tafsiran (lihat perenggan 35–37 & 43–44).

(3) Di mana pengecualian cukai diberikan di bawah ACP 1967 akan berhenti secara automatik menurut pindaan ACP 1967, pindaan-pindaan tersebut tidak menjejaskan perayu kerana ia tidak diberikan pengecualian di bawah ACP 1967 tetapi sebaliknya di bawah Ordinan 1947, yang mana pengecualian itu masih sah dan tidak dibatalkan. Menurut s 30(1)(b) Akta Tafsiran, perayu masih berhak mendapat pengecualian cukai. Pindaan-pindaan kepada perenggan 13 Jadual 6 ACP 1967 kesemuanya jelas menyatakan mempunyai kesan prospektif. Selanjutnya, di mana s 27 Akta Kewangan (No 2) 2000 secara spesifik mengecualikan pembayar cukai yang sebelum ini dikecualikan di bawah perenggan 13 Jadual 6 ACP 1967, ia tidak mengecualikan mereka yang dikecualikan di bawah s 13(1)(g) Ordinan 1947 (lihat perenggan 45–46).

(4) Walau apa pun bahawa perayu gagal mengambil prosedur rayuan di bawah s 99 ACP 1967, ia tidak boleh dikecualikan daripada memohon untuk semakan kehakiman (lihat perenggan 48).

(5) Mahkamah Tinggi terkhilaf dalam keputusannya berhubung beban bukti. Beban terletak pada responden untuk membuktikan fraud (lihat perenggan 50–51).]

Notes

For a case on does not affect earlier acts or rights, see 11(2) *Mallal's Digest* (5th Ed, 2015) para 2274.

Cases referred to

Government of Malaysia & Anor v Jagdis Singh [1987] 2 MLJ 185; [1987] CLJ Rep 110, SC (refd)

Keith Sellar v Lee Kwang; Tennakoon v Lee Kwang [1980] 2 MLJ 191, FC (refd)

Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri v Penang Realty Sdn Bhd and another appeal [2006] 3 MLJ 597; [2006] 2 CLJ 835, CA (refd)

Kim Thye Co v Ketua Pengarah Jabatan Hasil Dalam Negeri, Kuala Lumpur [1991] 3 CLJ Rep 20, HC (refd)

Metacorp Development v Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri [2011] 5 MLJ 447, HC (refd)

NTS Arumugam Pillai v Director-General of Inland Revenue [1977] 2 MLJ 63, FC (refd)

National Land Finance Co-Operative Society Ltd v Director General of Inland Revenue [1994] 1 MLJ 99; [1993] 4 CLJ 339, SC (folld)

Sinnaiyah & Sons Sdn Bhd v Damai Setia Sdn Bhd [2015] 5 MLJ 1, FC (refd)

Legislation referred to

Co-Operative Societies Act 1948 (repealed by Co-Operative Societies Act 1993) s 7

Income Tax Act 1967 ss 44(6), 90(1), 99, 112(3), 127, Schedule 6, Part 1, para 13, Schedule 9, para 33

Income Tax Ordinance 1947 (repealed by the Income Tax Act 1967) s 13(1)(f)(ii), 13(1)(g)

Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 s 30, 30(1)(b), (1)(d)

Finance (No 2) Act 2000 ss 26, 27

Finance Act 1986

Finance Act 1988

Finance Act 2000

Finance Act 2007 s 36

Appeal from: Application For Judicial Review No 25–8–04 of 2015 (High Court, Shah Alam)

DP Naban (S Saravana Kumar and Jason Tan with him) (Lee Hishammuddin Allen & Gledhill) for the appellant.

Zaleha bt Adam (Duna bt Mohd Isa dan Mohammad Fazli Lutffi bin Latiff with him) (Inland Revenue Board) for the respondent.

Tengku Maimun JCA (delivering judgment of the court):

[1] This was an appeal by the Society of La Salle Brothers ('the appellant') against the decision of the High Court in refusing the appellant's application for judicial review. The application was, among others for certiorari, to quash the notices of assessment dated 16 March 2015 for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 ('the years in dispute') issued

by the Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri ('the respondent'). A

[2] We heard the appeal and had unanimously allowed the same. Our reasons now follow.

THE BACKGROUND FACTS B

[3] The background facts as appeared in the affidavit in support of the appellant's judicial review application are as follows.

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[4] The appellant, also known as the visitor in the Federation of the Malaya of the Christian's Brothers School, has been in Malaysia for more than 160 years and has been instrumental in establishing a number of La Salle Schools in Malaysia. 39 such schools are still in operation where the appellant continues to be involved with these schools alongside the Ministry of Education. D

[5] The appellant's sole objective is to ensure that education is accessible to Malaysian of all races, religions and creed. The appellant has been and still is a charitable institution. It only holds investments in the form of fixed deposits, unit trust and securities. The returns from these investments generate sufficient E income for the appellant to be self financing. This position has been consistent for the years in dispute, except for the year of assessment 2004 where the appellant had a higher return gain due to the disposal of its property in Penang.

[6] By a letter dated 26 January 1970, the respondent confirmed that the F appellant enjoys tax exemption status. The said letter among others, states that the appellant is a charitable institution and is therefore not liable to income tax. The said letter was never withdrawn by the respondent.

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[7] By virtue of the tax exemption, the appellant did not subject any of its investment returns to income tax, and the appellant has never paid any income tax on its returns.

[8] By a letter dated 25 July 1995 the respondent informed the appellant of H the requirement to re-apply the tax exemption status. The appellant failed to do so.

[9] On 27 March 2015, the appellant was served with the notices of I assessment dated 16 March 2015 with penalties for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 (collectively referred to as 'notices of assessment'). The assessment raised (including the penalties) were more than RM40m.

A THE INCOME TAX ORDINANCE 1947/THE INCOME TAX ACT 1967

[10] Before the Income Tax Act 1967 ('the ITA 1967') came into effect, the Income Tax Ordinance 1947 ('the 1947 Ordinance') was in force where s 13(1)(g) provides:

B

13(1) There shall be exempt from tax —

(g) the income of any charitable institutions or of any body of persons or trust established for charitable purposes only:

C Provided that where a trade or business is carried on by any such institution, body of persons or trust, the income derived from such trade or business shall be exempt from tax only if such income is applied solely for charitable purposes and either —

(i) the trade or business is exercised in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of such institution, body of persons or trust; or

D

(ii) the work in connection with the trade or business is mainly carried on by persons for whose benefit such institution, body of persons or trust was established.

E

[11] When the whole of the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced by the ITA 1967 with effect from 1 January 1968, the ITA similarly provide for tax exemption vide s 127 of the ITA 1967 which reads:

F 127(1) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act —

(a) any income specified in Part 1 of Schedule 6; and

(b) the income of any institution, person, authority or fund specified in Part II of that Schedule,

G shall, subject to this section, be exempt from tax.

[12] As at 26 January 1970, para 13 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 read as follows:

H The income of any charitable institution, of the trust body of any trust or of any body of persons, if the institution, trust or body of persons in question is established for charitable purposes only:

Provided that, where a business is carried on by such institution, trust body or body of persons, the income from the business shall be exempt from tax only if it is applied solely for charitable purposes and either —

I

(a) the business is carried on in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the institution, trust or body of persons; or

(b) the work in connection with the business is carried on by persons for whose benefit the institution, trust or body of persons was established.

[13] Vide the Finance Act 1986 the proviso to para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 was amended. The amendment which took effect from the year of assessment 1987 read as follows:

Provided that —

(a) where a business is carried on by any such institution, trust body or body of persons, the income from the business shall be exempt from tax only if it is applied solely for the charitable purposes and either —

(i) the business is carried on in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the institution, trust or body of persons; or

(ii) the work in connection with the business is mainly carried on by persons for whose benefit the institution, trust or body of persons was established;

(b) the exemption under this paragraph shall not apply to income consisting of a dividend.

[14] Then again, by Finance Act 1988 which took effect from the year of assessment 1989, Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 was amended by substituting for para 13 the following:

13(1) Subject to this paragraph, the income, other than dividend income, of —

(a) a charitable institution, trust body of any trust or body of persons, if the institution, trust body or body of persons in question is established in Malaysia for charitable purposes only and approved by the Director General for the purposes of this paragraph;

(b) a building fund approved under subsection 44(6) or a religious institution or organization which is not operated or conducted primarily for profit and which is established in Malaysia exclusively for the purposes of religious worship or the advancement of religion.

(2) An institution, a trust body or body of persons referred to in subparagraph (1)(a) —

(a) shall apply for approval from the Director General; and

(b) shall apply its income, whether exempt or otherwise, solely for the charitable purposes or charitable objects within Malaysia and the amount so applied in a year of assessment shall not be less than seventy per cent (or such percentage as may be permitted by the Director General) of such income for the basis period for that year of assessment.

(3) Where a business is carried on by an institution, a trust body, body of persons or an organization referred to in subparagraph (1) the income from the business shall be exempt from tax if —

(a) the business is carried on in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the institution, trust body, body of persons or organization; or

A (b) the work in connection with the business is mainly carried on by persons for whose benefit the institution, trust body, body of persons or organization was established.

B **[15]** Paragraph 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 was again substituted vide s 26 of the Finance (No 2) Act 2000 with took effect from the year of assessment 2001. The new para 13 reads:

The income, other than dividend income, of —

C (a) an institution or organization approved for the purposes of subsection 44(6) so long as the approval remains in force; or

(b) a religious institution or organization which is not operated or conducted primarily for profit and which is established in Malaysia exclusively for the purposes of religious worship or the advancement of religion.

D **[16]** Further, s 27 of the Finance (No 2) Act 2000 provides for a special provision relating to para 13 of Schedule 6. It reads:

27 Notwithstanding any other provision of the principal Act, where a person is exempt by virtue of paragraph 13 of Schedule 6 before the coming into operation of
E the amendment to that paragraph in section 26 of this Act, that exemption shall cease from the year of assessment 2003 for the basis period ending in that year:

Provided that such exemption shall continue, under paragraph 13 of Schedule 6 as amended in this Act, where an approval is granted to such person upon an application made under subsection 44(6) of the principal Act.

F **[17]** By s 36 of the Finance Act 2007, para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA was again amended by deleting the words 'other than dividend income'.

THE JUDICIAL REVIEW APPLICATION

G **[18]** Based on the facts and the law set out above, the appellant applied and obtained leave to file judicial review, seeking to quash the respondent's decision in issuing the notices of assessment on the ground that the decision was ultra vires, illegal, void, unlawful and/or in excess of authority.

H **[19]** Before the learned High Court judge, the gist of the appellant's contention may be summarised as follows. The appellant was a charitable organisation and had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance. When the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced by the ITA 1967 and
I various amendments were made thereto, the appellant's right which was acquired before the amendments remained unaffected. In other words, the amendments that were brought about by the Finance Act in 1986, 1988, 2000 and 2007 did not have retrospective effect so as to impair the vested rights of the appellant in relation to the tax exemption.

[20] In opposing the judicial review application, the respondent advanced the following arguments:

(a) that the application for judicial review was an abuse of process of the court as the appellant failed to file an appeal to the Special Commissioners of the Income Tax as provided under s 99 of the ITA;

(b) the tax exemption status cannot be deemed to be granted in perpetuity. The appellant no longer enjoy the exemption as it failed to apply for the exemption status pursuant to the amendments to the law;

(c) although the notices of assessment for years of assessment 2004, 2006 and 2007 were issued outside the limitation period, there was fraud and/or negligence on the part of the appellant with regards to the tax exemption;

(d) the burden is on the appellant to prove that the assessment is excessive or erroneous; and

(e) the penalties were rightly imposed by the respondent on the appellant.

FINDINGS OF THE HIGH COURT

[21] The learned High Court judge considered the law as it stood on 26 January 1970 and the position after the amendments to para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 which took place in 1986, 1988, 2000 and 2007 where His Lordship concluded that the words in the ITA 1967 and the Finance Act are clear and unambiguous.

[22] Whist acknowledging that the appellant is a charitable organisation and not liable to income tax as confirmed by the respondent's letter dated 26 January 1970, His Lordship held that following the amendments to the law, in particular vide the Finance (No 2) Act 2000 read together with s 44(6) of the ITA 1967, the exemption enjoyed by the appellant has ceased to have effect from 2013 (*sic*) unless the appellant obtained approval for the tax exemption from the director general. Since the appellant had not obtained such approval, the appellant is not an institution or organisation pursuant to s 44(6) of the ITA 1967. The notices of assessments for the years of assessment 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 were therefore issued in accordance with the ITA 1967.

[23] The learned High Court judge further held that the argument by the appellant that the amendments cannot have retrospective effect does not apply on the facts of this case as the appellant had been notified to re-apply for the tax exemption.

[24] Citing *Government of Malaysia & Anor v Jagdis Singh* [1987] 2 MLJ

185; [1987] CLJ Rep 110, His Lordship further found that the application of judicial review was inappropriate and an abuse of the process of the court as the appellant had bluntly refused and failed to resort to the appeal procedure provided for under s 99 of the ITA 1967.

[25] On the issue of time bar, the learned judge ruled that the notices of assessment for the years 2004, 2006 and 2007 are beyond the period provided by s 90(1) of the ITA 1967. His Lordship further ruled that the burden of proof rests on the appellant to show that there is no existence of wilful fraud, negligence and wilful default, which the appellant had failed to show. The learned judge thus concluded that the respondent was rightfully entitled to issue the notices of assessment for the years 2004, 2006 and 2007.

[26] The learned trial judge also found that the imposition of the penalty by the respondent at the rate of 20% was in accordance with s 112(3) of the ITA 1967 in view of the appellant's failure to furnish their returns for the respective years by or before 30 April of the said assessment years.

[27] The appellant's application for judicial review on the basis that the respondent's decision was ultra vires, illegal, void, unlawful and/or in excess of authority was consequently dismissed, hence the appeal.

THE APPEAL

[28] Before us, learned counsel for the appellant raised the following issues:

(a) whether the learned High Court judge erred in holding that the appellant has lost its right of exemption by merely considering the amending provisions made to the ITA 1967 without considering that the appellant did not obtain the right of exemption under the ITA 1967 but under the 1947 Ordinance;

(b) whether the learned High Court judge was correct on the burden of proof on fraud, negligence and wilful default as regards the notices of assessment issued out of time; and

(c) whether the appellant was correct in filing the application for judicial review.

[29] Learned counsel for the respondent reiterated the position that the exemption granted to the appellant in 1970 has ceased to have effect through the amendments to the law and that the court has to give recognition to the amendments. Learned counsel repeated the arguments in the High Court in respect of the second and third issues raised by the appellant.

OUR FINDINGS

The right of tax exemption

[30] The learned High Court held that the appellant no longer enjoyed the exemption as the appellant had failed to re-apply for the exemption under the amended law. The first question for our determination was whether the appellant had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance or under the ITA 1967.

[31] This question was pertinent because the appellant contended that its right to the tax exemption accrued not under the ITA 1967 but under the 1947 Ordinance where in its affidavit in support for leave to apply for judicial review, the appellant highlighted the fact that the appellant has been in Malaysia for more than 160 years. The appellant further averred that in 1970, the respondent through its *Pengawal Besar Hasil Dalam Negeri* had confirmed that the appellant enjoyed the tax exemption status vide the respondent's letter dated 26 January 1970. The letter (see *rekod rayuan Jld* 2(2) *Bhg* C: p 265) reads:

> Tuan,
>
> Society of La Salle Brothers
>
> I refer to your last letter dated 20th November 1969.
>
> 2. The documents and information furnished have been examined and it is now confirmed —
>
> (a) that the Society of the La Salle Brothers in Malaysia is a charitable institution and is therefore not liable to income tax;
>
> (b) ...
>
> (c) ...
>
> 3. The following papers are returned herewith —
>
> (a) Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools 1925 Edition;
>
> (b) The Rule and the Constitutions, 1967–1968; and
>
> (c) Book of Government, 1967–1968.

[32] We noted that the respondent's letter dated 26 January 1970 made reference to the appellant's 'last letter' and that the respondent used the word 'confirmed', signifying that there would have been other earlier letters from the appellant and that there would have been an earlier decision granting the exemption, such that the respondent in the January 1970 letter only 'confirmed' that the appellant was exempted from paying income tax.

[33] In the course of the hearing of the appeal, we had posed the question to learned counsel for the appellant as to the earlier letters and as to whether there was any document to show specifically the grant of exemption under the 1947 Ordinance, but counsel conceded that there was none.

[34] Be that as it may, having perused the records of appeal, we found that the respondent did not mount any challenge in respect of the appellant's averment that they had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance (see *rekod rayuan tambahan*: pp 60–61 and 66–77). In fact in the High Court, learned counsel for the respondent submitted as follows (*rekod rayuan tambahan*: p 81):

> ... in view of the operation of the law, with the amendments under the Finance Act that has been *gazetted*, the Applicant's right has been automatically ceased ... They cannot bring up the issue that they have been a charitable institution that they have had an exemption for more than a hundred years, because base (*sic*) on the case laws itself, it does not excuse them and they were further notified in 1995 by the Respondent of the amendments to which they have totally ignored ...

[35] Premised on the above, it was apparent that the respondent had not seriously denied that the appellant has been in Malaysia for more than a hundred years and that the appellant had enjoyed the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance, except that the respondent contended that under the law as amended, the appellant must re-apply to continue to enjoy the exemption. We therefore accepted the appellant's position that it had been granted the tax exemption under the 1947 Ordinance and that it follows that the exemption was granted not through the letter dated 26 January 1970 but much earlier than that.

[36] The next question was whether the exemption that was enjoyed by the appellant had been impaired by the repeal of the 1947 Ordinance. It would be pertinent to note that while the 1947 Ordinance was repealed and replaced in whole by the ITA 1967, there are no express provisions in the ITA 1967 which indicate that the vested rights acquired under the 1947 Ordinance shall be revoked.

[37] In this regard, learned counsel for the appellant highlighted s 30 of the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 ('the Interpretation Acts') which provides:

> *30 Matters not affected by repeal*
>
> (1) The repeal of a written law in whole or in part shall not —
>
> (a) ...
>
> (b) affect any right, privilege, obligation or liability acquired, accrued or incurred under the repealed law;

(c) ...

(d) ...

[38] Learned counsel for the appellant submitted that the learned High Court judge erred in not considering s 30 of the Interpretation Acts and its applicability to the taxing statute.

[39] In considering whether the learned judge erred as contended by the appellant, we found guidance in the judgment of the Supreme Court in *National Land Finance Co-Operative Society Ltd v Director General of Inland Revenue* [1994] 1 MLJ 99; [1993] 4 CLJ 339.

[40] In *National Land Finance Co-Operative Society Ltd*, the appellant, being a society registered under s 7 of the Co-Operative Societies Act 1948, was exempted from paying income tax under s 13(1)(f)(ii) of the 1947 Ordinance. On repeal of the 1947 Ordinance, the exemption was continued by para 33 of Schedule 9 of the ITA 1967. The respondent, contending that the amendment to the proviso to the said para 33 by Act A471 of 1980 had removed the exemption and made the amendment retrospective to the year of assessment 1968, raised assessments afresh on the appellant for the years of assessment 1977–1981.

[41] The Special Commissioners of the Income Tax discharged the assessments raised holding that the amendment to para 33 of Schedule 9 of the ITA 1967 did not have the effect of removing the exemption from tax. On appeal by the respondent, the High Court held that the appellant no longer enjoyed the exemption by virtue of the said amendment and reversed the decision of the Special Commissioners. The appellant appealed to the Supreme Court. In allowing the appeal, Gunn Chit Tuan CJ (Malaya) said at p 106 (MLJ); p 344 (CLJ):

> In this case it is clear that the tax payer had an acquired right to exemption from tax under the Income Tax Ordinance 1947, when the Act came into force on 20 September 1967. That acquired right which was confirmed by the Special Commissioners of Income Tax in Case No PKR 256 should only be overruled prospectively and not retrospectively. Admittedly the Legislature had made its intention clear in s 1(5) of the Amendment Act A471 that s 16 therein which amended Schedule 9 of the Act shall be deemed to have effect for the year of assessment 1968 and subsequent years of assessment. But the amendment Act A471 did not also expressly provide that Part I of the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967 (Act 388) which includes the said s 30 of the Act shall not apply. Therefore following the decision of Viscount Dilhorne, Lord Diplock and Lord Edmund-Davies in the House of Lords' case of *Floor v Davis (Inspector of Taxes)*, the provisions of the Act must be construed having regard to the Interpretation Acts 1948 and 1967. There is therefore a doubt, whether the

A Legislature had intended to impair the existing right of the tax payer and inflict a detriment to it as it takes away a vested right under the existing law to exemption from tax. As there is a doubt the ambiguity must be construed in favour of the tax payer as the said exemption from tax has not been removed by sufficiently clear words to achieve that purpose.

B

[42] In *Keith Sellar v Lee Kwang; Tennakoon v Lee Kwang* [1980] 2 MLJ 191, the Federal Court in dealing with paras (b) and (d) of the Interpretation Acts stated that the right approach should be that unless it is so expressed in the new law, a vested right is not taken away.

C

[43] We agreed with learned counsel for the appellant that the learned High Court judge, in rejecting the argument of learned counsel for the appellant that the amendments to the ITA 1967 did not affect the appellant's right, had failed to direct his mind to s 30 of the Interpretation Acts. With respect, this failure was an error of law. We also noted that except for reiterating its position that tax exemption accorded to the appellant in 1970 had automatically ceased and that the appellant needed to re-apply which the appellant failed to do, we found that learned counsel for the respondent similarly had not addressed s 30 of the Interpretation Acts.

D

E

[44] To our mind, the authorities, as set out above are clearly in support of the appellant's position. We agreed with learned counsel for the appellant that while the ITA 1967 repealed the whole of the Income Tax Ordinance 1947, there is nothing in the ITA 1967 which had expressly taken away the appellant's vested right under the 1947 Ordinance. Neither is there anything in the amending provisions which are inconsistent with the application of s 30 of the Interpretation Acts.

F

G

[45] Hence, while the tax exemption granted under the ITA 1967 would have ceased automatically pursuant to the amendments to the ITA 1967, those amendments do not affect the appellant as it had not been granted the exemption under the ITA 1967 but rather under the 1947 Ordinance, which exemption remains valid and has not been revoked. Pursuant to s 30(1)(b) of the Interpretation Acts, the appellant, in our judgment continues to be entitled to the tax exemption.

H

[46] At this juncture it is perhaps pertinent to highlight that the amendments to para 13 of the Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967 have all been expressly stated to have prospective effect. Further, it is to be noted that while s 27 of the Finance (No 2) Act 2000 specifically excludes taxpayers that were previously exempted under para 13 of Schedule 6 of the ITA 1967, it did not exclude those exempted under s 13(1)(g) of the 1947 Ordinance.

I

[47] In the premises, we found that the respondent had no basis in law to issue the said notices of assessment and that the decision to issue those notices were illegal and without jurisdiction.

[48] Given that the respondent acted without jurisdiction, the third issue has to be resolved in favour of the appellant. Notwithstanding that it has failed to resort to the appeal procedure under s 99 of the ITA 1967, the appellant cannot be precluded from applying for judicial review. This principle was set out in *Government of Malaysia & Anor v Jagdis Singh* where Hashim Yeop Sani SCJ said at p 189 (MLJ); p 115 (CLJ):

> A clear principle is reiterated here ie it is not a rigid rule that whenever there is an appeal procedure available to the applicant he should be denied judicial review. Judicial review is always at the discretion of the court but where there are other avenue or remedy open to the applicant it will only be exercised in very exceptional circumstances.
>
> In *Re Preston* was a tax case. It was quite clear from the speeches of Their Lordships in the House of Lords that the Inland Revenue Commissioners were not immune from the process of judicial review. But what was also made clear is that remedy by way of judicial review is not to be available where an alternative remedy exists except in very exceptional cases.
>
> In answer to the first question we would therefore hold that the discretion is still with the courts but where there is an appeal provision available to the applicant certiorari should not normally issue unless there is shown a clear lack of jurisdiction or a blatant failure to perform some statutory duty or in appropriate cases a serious breach of the principles of natural justice.

(See also *Metacorp Development v Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri* [2011] 5 MLJ 447; *Kim Thye Co v Ketua Pengarah Jabatan Hasil Dalam Negeri, Kuala Lumpur* [1991] 3 CLJ Rep 20; *Ketua Pengarah Hasil Dalam Negeri v Penang Realty Sdn Bhd and another appeal* [2006] 3 MLJ 597; [2006] 2 CLJ 835).

[49] In the light of the above findings, the decision of the learned High Court judge, with respect, could not be sustained.

[50] Although the second issue raised by learned counsel would be of no significance to the outcome of this appeal given our earlier findings, for completeness, we found that the learned High Court judge erred in his ruling on the burden of proof. Suffice if we cite *NTS Arumugam Pillai v Director-General of Inland Revenue* [1977] 2 MLJ 63. In *NTS Arumugam Pillai*, the Special Commissioners of the Income Tax ruled that the Revenue was to prove fraud and wilful default beyond reasonable doubt and the burden on the appellant to rebut the case against him was on a balance of probabilities. The High Court found the decision of the Special Commissioners on the burden of proof 'so eminently correct'. The Federal Court found 'no valid legal

objections that can be sustained' in respect of the High Court's decision.

[51] While the standard of proof may have changed due to the decision of the Federal Court in *Sinnaiyah & Sons Sdn Bhd v Damai Setia Sdn Bhd* [2015] 5 MLJ 1 which held that at law there are only two standards of proof, namely beyond reasonable doubt for criminal cases and balance of probabilities for civil cases, we opined that *Sinnaiyah* does not alter the burden, which in the instant appeal will remain on the respondent to prove fraud.

CONCLUSION

[52] To conclude, we found that the decision of the respondent in issuing the notices of assessment was illegal as it has failed to take into account the appellant's vested right under the 1947 Ordinance which has not been shown to have been impaired by the amendments effected to the ITA 1967. The failure of the appellant to re-apply for the tax exemption in our view was of no significance. The decision of the respondent was thus amenable to judicial review. The appeal was consequently allowed.

Appeal allowed.

Reported by Ashok Kumar